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November 14, 1993

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R. Weissman notes ver: 10/14/93

AUTOMATED SELF-SERVICE REGISTRATION SYSTEM

I. BACKGROUND

As it currently exists, on-site attendee registration at tradeshows is an expensive and time consuming procedure. Long lines with waits of 30 minutes or more are all too common at major shows. Attendees who are forced to wait on lines experience a great deal of aggravation. This aggravation creates an immediate negative attitude about the overall show experience and also negatively affects the conversations they have with the exhibitors. Certainly, time spent on lines also detracts from the overall amount of time that attendees can spend with exhibitors.

The costs to show management of staffing traditional registration set-ups are sizeable, and simply adding more people does little to break the logjam at major shows. Further, most halls have limited registration space, so adding people is not always a viable alternative.

The typical steps to register are as follows:

A. For attendees who have not pre-registered:

1. Attendee goes to a registration kiosk or counter and fills out a three or four part NCR registration form with biographical information including name, firm, title, address, etc; and also answers 10 to 20 questions regarding size of business, primary focus, etc. The attendee also selects the registration package or individual options desired.

2. Attendee goes to cashier who inspects options requested, checks total cost, and takes payment in cash, check, or credit card and approves the form.

3. Attendee then proceeds to badge typist who manually enters into the computer system virtually all of the information that the attendee originally entered on registration form, .

4. Attendee proceeds to badge printing station where an assistant will hand completed badge and holder to attendee.

B. For attendees who have a complimentary ticket to the exhibits but who have not pre-registered:

1. Attendee fills out complimentary registration form (either before or at the show) with biographical and company information described above.

2. Attendee then proceeds to badge typist who manually enters into the computer system virtually all information that the attendee previously entered on registration form.

3. Attendee proceeds to badge printing station where an assistant will hand completed badge and holder to attendee.

C. for attendees who registered in advance, but too late to have their badge and credentials mailed to them.

1. Attendee must go the a "will-call" desk where registration personnel will search for their badge.

In terms of modern technology available to us, the above system with numerous steps and duplication of effort is simply not good business for major trade shows. An alternative does exist....

II. CONCEPT

An automated, computerized self-registration system combining many of the elements found in automated bank teller machines and airline ticketing systems.

The ideal configuration would have an octagonal kiosk. There would be terminal screens and keyboards on seven sides of the kiosk. These terminals would also house credit card reading devices (and possible a bar code reader). The eighth side would be where the output from the kiosk printer is delivered. A printer (laser, dot, or combination) would be housed within the octagon. The terminals would be tied into the regular registration computer systems.

Upon approaching the terminal, the attendee would see an interactive welcoming screen with instructions. In essence the registration form and instructions would be on the screen as opposed to triplicate NCR paper. Attendees would enter information with a keyboard instead of pen or pencil.

The attendee would be quickly taken through a series of screens that would complete the entire registration procedure.

Methods of registration:

A. for attendees who have not preregistered and are selecting plans that require payment:

1. attendee would insert their credit card into a card reader slot.

2. attendee would complete registration form; name, company, biographical, registration selections etc., directly via keyboard.

3. attendee would go to "eighth side" of the kiosk where one registration "facilitator" would be on hand to distribute the badges and tickets as they come from the printer. The attendee would also be handed their badge holder and directory at this point, and be ready for the show.

B. for attendees with complimentary ticket to the exhibits:

1. the complimentary pass forms should be bar-coded so that each pass could only be used once. The terminal would have a bar code reader slot. Once the pass was inserted into the reader slot, the attendee would see a screen requesting the necessary information for the badge, and then proceed to the printer side of the kiosk.

C. for attendees who have preregistered too late to have their credentials mailed to them.

1. attendees would enter their name at terminal and pre-ordered credentials would be delivered from the printer.

III. BENEFITS

1. Currently, the on-site registration form is being filled out twice: one by the attendee by hand, and once by a registration typist (after a significant wait on line). Now it will only be entered once. Further, it will be entered faster. The registration typist must continually refer to the form, decipher hand-writing, etc. Even if an attendee is not a professional typist (which most registration personnel are not anyway!) he/she can probably type their name, title, firm address, etc., faster than a pro, simply because they've done it thousands of times, and don't have to refer to a form to see who they are, how their firm name is spelled, etc.

Therefore: time is saved by entering information much faster and by not duplicating effort. Money is saved since typist staff can be significantly reduced.

2. Since the terminal will accept credit card payments, cashier staff can be reduced.

3. Self registration for complimentary passes is a tremendous benefit. These passes, generally for exhibits only, provide no income to show management, yet represent the bulk of registration lines at the average show.

4. As an illustration of the savings in personal, consider a show manager augmenting his registration with six registration octagons. That would be the equivalent of adding 42 badge typing stations!

While the costs benefits are obvious, the key benefit is getting attendees into the show as quickly as possible. The more time they spend with exhibitors, the happier the exhibitors are. The less time attendees waste on line puts them in a better frame of mind...more attentive when discussing business with exhibitors...more like to return to the show next year.

The automated system would not eliminate traditional systems, but significantly reduce their cost and size. People paying with cash or check, along with the "technology adverse" would use the traditional system. (In the future, those paying with cash or check may simply go immediately to the cashier, verbally indicate which registration options they want, pay the appropriate amount, and receive a chit of some sort which would be fed into a reader at the standard terminal which will then prompt the attendee for the name, title, address, etc.

There is no doubt that self-registration will be the choice of the overwhelming majority of attendees. People are already comfortable with bank teller machines and a variety self-ticketing outlets. They are also comfortable with computer keyboards, and interactive programs. There will be little fear in trying something new, especially when faced with the alternative of standing on lines.

Previous negative experiences with traditional registration methods will also make attendees more likely to choose self-registration.

NOTES

1. The instructional and interactive screens can be programmed and designed to exactly replicate the forms used by virtually any show management organization.

2. Attendees paying by credit card would see a final screen indicating all of their choices and asking if it is correct before printing. Of course they can change their choices at any time during entry, and exit at any time with no charges. There should be a desk where attendees go with any discrepancies.

3. Any type(s) of printers could be used with the system: laser, dot matrix, plastic card embosser. One possible system setup is a laser printer printing on blank badge stock with mag strip on the back. The badge holder (handed out by the kiosk facilitator) would be color coded to indicate the type of registrant; seminars, exhibits only, etc. The mag strip would contain information for use in the lead retrieval systems. The badge stock could also be used to print separate seminar/event tickets...personalized with the attendee name, registration code etc. The mag strip could also contain this information, if desired. The back of the badge could serve as the attendee receipt, or a separate receipt could be printed.

4. The system could also provide similar benefits with exhibitor, press, and speaker registrations.

.......It's difficult to imagine any show manager refusing to at least try a few kiosks in conjunction with a traditional system, in order to evaluate more extensive use at subsequent shows.